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Plutarch at the Crossroads of Religion and Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

PLUTARCH AT THE CROSSROADS OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta

Plutarch of Chaeronea, who was born to a wealthy family in 45 CE, received the best education at home and abroad. He frequently traveled to Rome,¹ Alexandria and Athens;² while in Athens he probably attended the lectures of Ammonius,³ who influenced his adoption of Platonism.⁴ However, he spent most of his life in his hometown of Chaeronea, where he later founded a sort of philosophical school or academy in which family, friends and pupils could meet and discuss philosophical issues. Due to his social provenance and education, he developed a rich political career⁵ and social life in which he was acquainted with most of the prominent political and cultural figures of the period.⁶ He is therefore a first-rate witness to the cultural life of late antiquity.

¹ See C.P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford 1971) and S.C.R. Swain, "Plutarch, Plato, Athens, and Rome", in J. Barnes & M. Griffith (eds), *Philosophia Togata, II: Plato and Aristotle at Rome* (Oxford 1997) 165–187.

² K. Ziegler, "Plutarchos", *RE*, XXI (1951) 636–962 at 653–657 in his overview of Plutarch's travels, he points out (653) that his testimony is essential for our knowledge of the history and topography of ancient Athens.

³ See Plu., *De E* 385B; 387F; C.P. Jones, "The Teacher of Plutarch", *HSCPh* 71 (1967) 205–213; J. Whittaker, "Ammonius on the Delphic E", *CQ* 19 (1969) 185–192; H. Dörrie, "Die Stellung Plutarchs im Platonismus seiner Zeit", in R.B. Palmer & R. Hammerton-Kelly (eds), *Philomathes. Studies and Essays in the Humanities in Memory of Philip Merlan* (The Hague 1971) 36–56; P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, I (Berlin-New York 1973) 18–28; J.M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca 1996 [1977]) 189–192; R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* (Paris 1989) 164–165; B. Puech, "Prosopographie des amis de Plutarque", *ANRW* II 33.6 (1992) 4831–4893 at 4831–4893.

⁴ However, Plutarch seems to have left the Academy rather early, which H. Dörrie, "Der Platonismus in der Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte der frühen Kaiserzeit", in *Platonica minora* (Munich 1976) 166–210 at 183, traces back to Plutarch's fundamental disagreement with some of the main tenets of Platonism, such as his literal reading of the *Timaeus* which implied his view that the cosmos was created after time, on which C. Froidefond commented, "Plutarque et le Platonisme", *ANRW* II.36.1 (1987) 184–243 at 189–197. See further Dörrie, "Die Stellung Plutarchs", 36–56.

⁵ Ziegler, "Plutarchos", 657–659.

⁶ Ziegler, "Plutarchos", 666–696 and Puech, "Prosopographie des amis de Plutarque", 4831–4893.

1. *Plutarch and the Philosophical Discourse*

Plutarch's testimony is essential to reconstructing and understanding the philosophical and religious worlds of late antiquity. Even if he is not always cherished as a philosopher by his readers,⁷ Plutarch plays a key role in the history of ancient philosophy, both as an active part of the philosophical discussion taking place in his time and as a more detached observer of other important events. In fact, he is credited as the most important Middle Platonist author,⁸ not only for the bulk of his philosophical production—more than half of his recorded works in the Catalogue of Lamprias are devoted to philosophical matters—but also for the extensive influence he exerted on both Middle and Neoplatonic authors. The copious quotes or allusions to his person and work in antiquity bear witness to his central importance in the philosophical map of antiquity: Neopythagoreans, Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists and Christians alike frequently appealed to his authority.⁹

Plutarch's works are enormously important to the history of ancient philosophy. First, his testimony is essential to understanding the development of Platonism in the first centuries of the era. Indeed, his relationship with the Academy, his version of Platonism, his role in Middle Platonism, his contribution to or his evidence regarding the formation of the typically Middle

⁷ This is valid for both his ancient and modern readers. Thus, for example, Neoplatonists such as Proclus who were scandalized by his view of the origins of the cosmos, mostly viewed Plutarch as an historian, and in this line, Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* describes him as “a litterateur and antiquarian”. See *contra*, F. Brenk, “An Imperial Heritage: The Religious Spirit of Plutarch”, *ANRW* II.36.1 (1987) 248–349; and Froidefond, “Plutarque et le Platonisme”, 233. A middle point may be found in Dörrie, “Der Platonismus”, 184, which distinguishes the ancient from the modern perception of the sense in which Plutarch's work may be called “philosophical”. While from a modern perspective only the treatises against Epicureans and Stoics are philosophical, from an ancient perspective almost every work of his literary production might be considered philosophical: “Im antiken Sinne ist freilich alles philosophisch, was Plutarch aufzeichnete—philosophisch darum, weil aus den zahlreichen einzelnen Beobachtungen, die sich auf Phänomene der Natur und der Literatur beziehen, wieder und wieder Schlüsse auf das hinter ihnen Verborgene gezogen werden, etc”. See in this volume the chapter by G. Roskam, 85–100, esp. 98–99.

⁸ M. Baltes, “Plutarch of Chaeronea. III. Philosophical Work. A. Education”, in “Plutarchus”, *Brill's New Pauly*. Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider. Brill Online, 2012. Reference. University of Groningen. 24 May 2012 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/plutarchus-eg28690>.

⁹ R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig 1912) is still the best study on Plutarch's reception; Ziegler, “Plutarchos”, 947–962; for the influence of his ethical and theological writings on early Christianity, see H.D. Betz (ed.), *Plutarch's Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1975) and idem (ed.), *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1978).

Platonic lore as a prelude to Neoplatonism¹⁰ and his participation from a Platonic perspective in the interschool philosophical polemics of the time are all precious elements both for the reconstruction of Middle Platonism as such and for the assessment of its relationship with the other philosophical schools. The marked religious character of his approach to philosophy, which he shares with numerous Middle Platonists, has also helped scholars to better understand the characteristic confluence of religion and philosophy in the first centuries of the era.¹¹

But his philosophical interests went far beyond the strict borders of his school; he observed many other philosophical groups. As is also the case with other Middle Platonists, Aristotle enjoys a special status in the work of Plutarch, who also addressed the Presocratics,¹² Socrates,¹³ Cyrenaicans, Stoa¹⁴ and Epicureanism,¹⁵ usually providing exceptional or unique echoes

¹⁰ R.M. Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Menasha 1916); H. Dörrie, "Le platonisme de Plutarque", in *Actes du VIII^e Congrès de l'Association Guillaume Budé, Paris, 5–10 avril 1968* (Paris 1969) 519–530; idem, "Die Stellung Plutarchs im Platonismus"; Froidefond, "Plutarque et le platonisme"; D. Tsekourakis, "Pythagoreanism or Platonism and Ancient Medicine? The Reasons for Vegetarianism in Plutarch's *Moralia*", *ANRW* II.36.1 (1987) 366–393; P.L. Donini, "Science and Metaphysics: Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism in Plutarch's *On the Face in the Moon*", in J.M. Dillon & A.A. Long (eds), *The Question of Eclecticism* (Berkeley–Los Angeles 1988) 15–33; idem, "Plutarco e la rinascita del platonismo", in G. Cambiano – L. Canfora & D. Lanza, *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica* I.3 (Rome 1994) 35–60; idem, "L'eredità accademica e i fondamenti del platonismo in Plutarco", in M. Barbanti – G. Giardina & P. Manganaro, *Henosis kai Philia. Unione e amicizia. Omaggio a Francesco Romano* (Catania 2003) 247–273; J. Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism* (Brussels 1998); idem, "The Place of Plutarch in the History of Platonism", in P. Volpe Cacciatore & F. Ferrari (eds), *Plutarco e la cultura della sua età. Atti del X Convegno plutarcheo, Fisciano–Paestum, 27–29 ottobre 2005* (Naples 2007) 281–310.

¹¹ On Plutarch's characteristic mixture of philosophy and religion, see Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch*, 23; R. Flacelière, "Plutarque et la Pythie", *REG* 56 (1943) 72–111 at 110–111; D. Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme* (Paris 1969) 368; F.E. Brenk, "From Mysticism to Mysticism. The Religious Development of Plutarchus of Chaeronea", *SBL Seminar Papers* 1 (1975) 193–198.

¹² Eus., *PE* 1.8.1–12, attributes Plutarch a *florilegium* of philosophers, from which he extracts his overview of Presocratics such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Democritus, Parmenides, Zeno of Elea and others. See Ziegler, "Plutarchos", 768.

¹³ J. Opsomer, *Searchers of the Truth* (Leuven 1999) 127–162.

¹⁴ Plutarch wrote, according to Ziegler, "Plutarchos", 753–761, eight or nine specific treatises against the Stoics, of which two are preserved completely (*De Stoic. repugn.* and *Adv. Stoic.*), although criticism against the Stoa can be found *passim*. See J.P. Hershbell, "Plutarch and Stoicism", *ANRW* II.36.5 (1992) 3336–3352.

¹⁵ Also, Plutarch seems to have written eight treatises against Epicureans, of which only three are preserved (*Adv. Col.*, *Non poss.*, *An recte dictum*); Ziegler, "Plutarchos", 761–767; See Hershbell, "Plutarch and Epicureanism", 3353–3383.

of theories and viewpoints. His testimony has been essential for the transmission of innumerable fragments from the Stoics and Epicurus.¹⁶

Take for example the character, development and influence of Aristotelian philosophy in antiquity. On the level of detail and anecdote, for example, Plutarch's *Life of Sulla*¹⁷ includes the probably legendary story,¹⁸ also recorded in slightly different terms by Strabo,¹⁹ of how the manuscripts of the *Corpus aristotelicum* ended up in a cellar in the city of Scepsis. For centuries, this story provided a plausible explanation for the decline of the Lyceum after Aristotle's death, which was already noticed in antiquity.²⁰ According to this story, the books were first inherited by Theophrastus and then bequeathed to Neleus of Scepsis, who took them from Athens to Scepsis when he returned to his native city. The books were gravely damaged in Scepsis because Neleus' descendants—careless and illiterate people, according to Plutarch—apparently hid them in a cellar to keep them from being taken to Pergamum Library, and they remained there for around two centuries.

Even if apocryphal, for centuries this story also explained the revival of Aristotelianism in the first centuries CE. Plutarch described how Sulla, who arrived at Piraeus in 86 BC, seized the library of the recently dead Apellicon of Teos²¹—who had since acquired the *Corpus aristotelicum*—and took it to Rome. It is here that the renowned grammarian Tyrannion of Amisus finally repaired and edited the books and apparently provided copies to Andronicos of Rhodes, on the basis of which this philosopher prepared an edition of Aristotle's works around 60 BC.²²

¹⁶ A quick look to the major editions of both Stoics and Epicurus immediately reveals that Plutarch's writings were a major source for the fragments of the philosophers.

¹⁷ Plu., *Sulla* 26.

¹⁸ See H.B. Gottschalk, "Notes on the Wills of the Peripatetic Scholarchs", *Hermes* 100 (1972) 314–342.

¹⁹ See Str. 13.68.

²⁰ As commented upon by Cic., *De fin.* 5.5.13; *Tusc.* 4.5.9.

²¹ See I. Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Göteborg 1957) 375, 382; Gottschalk, "Notes on the Wills", 335–342; Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus* I, 18; H.B. Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century", *ANRW* II.36.1 (1987) 1079–1174 at 1083–1087; and more recently H. Lindsay, "Strabo on Apellicon's Library", *RhM* 140 (1997) 290–298.

²² On this issue, see the thorough analysis of Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus* I, 1–94, who compares the testimonies of Strabo and Plutarch and critically analyzes the contents of their information and, more recently, Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy", 1083–1097.

On a more fundamental level, however, Plutarch's oeuvre as a whole is especially valuable for the assessment of the general character of Aristotelian philosophy in antiquity and for particular inquiries about some of the numerous aspects of Aristotle's thought that remain obscure.²³ As has been pointed out, the fact that Plutarch was deeply interested in Aristotle is obvious because up to four titles of his works in the Catalogue of Lamprias are concerned with Aristotelian philosophy.²⁴ However, as in the cases of the Stoics and Epicureans, not only specific works but the whole Plutarchean *corpus* provides testimony of this interest. Admittedly, the last quarter of the twentieth century saw some attempts to qualify Plutarch's knowledge of Aristotle as "indirect". Since, excluding some exoteric works, Plutarch rarely quotes the philosopher, some scholars affirmed that he may have only known Aristotle through intermediate works.²⁵ Recent years have seen a renewed assessment of Plutarch's wide and direct knowledge of Aristotle's exoteric and esoteric works.²⁶

One of these scholars is A.P. Bos, whose study in the present volume, "Plutarch on the Sleeping Soul and the Waking Intellect and Aristotle's Double Entelechy Concept", affirms that Plutarch's *corpus* allows us to assess the extensive influence of Aristotle's published and unpublished writings.²⁷ In this study and in other previous works,²⁸ Bos also asserts that Plutarch's

²³ See G. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford 2006) chapter 2 "Plutarch".

²⁴ The titles of these works are *Lecture on the Ten Categories* (n. 192), *Aristotle's Topics* (n. 56), *On the Fifth Substance* (n. 44) and *On Theophrastus' Πρὸς τοὺς καιροὺς πολιτικά* (n. 52–53). However, the existence of the second and third treatises has been challenged by E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, III 2, 180 note 1; F.H. Sandbach, *Plutarch's Moralia*, XV (London–Cambridge 1969), 6–12; idem, "Plutarch and Aristotle", *ICS* 7 (1982) 207–232 at 212. See, on this issue, Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy", 1146–1147.

²⁵ See Düring, *Aristotle*, 354–355; Sandbach, "Plutarch and Aristotle"; P.L. Donini, *Tre studi sull'Aristotelismo nel II secolo D.C.* (Turin 1974) 64–80; idem, "Lo scetticismo accademico, Aristotele e l'unità della tradizione platonica secondo Plutarco", in G. Cambiano (ed.), *Storiografia endossografia nella filosofia antica* (Turin 1986) 214–216. *Contra* see Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle*, 90.

²⁶ See Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle*, chapter 2.

²⁷ See below, this volume, 25–42. See also C. Santaniello, "Traces of the Lost Aristotle in Plutarch", in A. Pérez Jiménez et al., *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles* (Madrid 1999), 629–641. Also see the studies by A.P. Bos mentioned in notes 28 and 29.

²⁸ See, for example, A.P. Bos, "Plutarch's Testimony to an Earlier Explanation of Aristotle's Definition of the Soul", in Pérez Jiménez et al., *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles*, 535–548; A.P. Bos, "The Distinction between 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian' Dualism, Illustrated from Plutarch's Myth in *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*", in A. Pérez Jiménez & F. Casadesús Bordoy (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco. Misticismo y Religiones Místicas en la Obra de Plutarco* (Madrid–Malaga 2001) 57–70.

testimony is essential to disproving the developmental view of Aristotle's thought that reigned in the twentieth century due to the influence of W. Jaeger and F.J.C.J. Nuyens.²⁹ As a matter of fact, Plutarch affirms the fundamental unity of Aristotle's published and unpublished works, showing³⁰ that there was no contradiction or opposition between the views Aristotle explored in dialogues such as the *Eudemus*, *Protrepticos* or *On Philosophy* and the theories he more systematically exposed in the lectures contained in the *corpus*. The analysis of particular Aristotelian echoes in the works of Plutarch provides enough material to support this view.

This is particularly the case in Bos' revision and redefinition of Aristotle's definition of the soul. Taking the myth of a "dreaming Kronos" at the end of Plutarch's *De facie*³¹ as a starting point, Bos engages in a far-reaching analysis of Aristotle's view of the soul as a double entelechy.³² After reviewing Aristotle's famous definition of the soul as the "first entelechy of a natural body which potentially possesses life and is *organikon*", Bos shows that the "natural body" is nothing but the vital heat, which Aristotle frequently referred to in a variety of ways, and that it serves the soul as an instrument for its typical psychical functions.³³ The term *organikon* in the quoted definition should therefore not be translated as "equipped with organs" but rather as "serving as an instrument", a translation for which an interesting passage of Plutarch's *Platonic Questions* also provides good support.³⁴

In order to explain in which way the soul is the entelechy of this natural body, Bos launches a full analysis of the double sense with which "entelechy" is used in *On the Soul* 2.1, which shows that Aristotle conceived of the soul as an entelechy in a double way: when described as "asleep" the soul is seen as forming a unity with its instrumental natural body; when the intellect is referred to as "waking entelechy" it is because it is free of any bodily covering. This is the reason why it can be compared to the sailor who, after arriving in a safe harbor, no longer needs his ship. These Aristotelian views, which are generally traceable in Middle Platonic authors such as Philo

²⁹ On the developmental interpretation due to both scholars, see A.P. Bos, *The Soul and its Instrumental Body. A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden 2003) 13–17 and 17–20, respectively.

³⁰ Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle*, 92 n. 27, rightly affirms that Plutarch's distinction between esoteric and exoteric works in *Vita Alexandri* 6 does testify to his knowledge of Aristotle's work as a whole.

³¹ Plu., *De fac.* 941F.

³² See A.P. Bos, *Cosmic and Meta-Cosmic Theology in Aristotle's Lost Dialogues* (Leiden 1989) 16–20 and idem, *The Soul*, 224, 331, 345.

³³ See A.P. Bos, "Plutarch on the Sleeping Soul", 30–38.

³⁴ See Plu., *Qu. Plat.* 8, 1006D, with Bos, "Plutarch's Testimony", 536.

or Alcinous,³⁵ are notably present in Plutarch and influenced his double theology, his view of a twofold death, the pneumatic vehicle of the soul and, especially, the notion of the Sleeping (World) Soul,³⁶ which clearly echoes the conception of a sleeping and waking soul.³⁷

Plutarch also interacted with the Stoa, especially about ethics, one of his beloved subjects.³⁸ A quick look at the works included in *Moralia* clearly shows that of all the philosophical disciplines, ethics was the most cherished by Plutarch³⁹ and the name of the *corpus* already points to its mainly ethical character. However, scholars have recently stressed the importance of ethics in the *Lives* as well.⁴⁰ Despite the centrality of ethics in Plutarch's oeuvre, it is only after K. Ziegler's study⁴¹ that it began to receive special attention.⁴² Indeed, the last years have seen a renewed interest in his ethical works.⁴³

³⁵ See, for example, Philo, *De opif. mund.* 16–25; *Abr.* 60–72 with A.P. Bos, “Philo of Alexandria a Platonist in the Image and Likeness of Aristotle”, *StudPhilon* 10 (1998) 66–86; Alcinous, *Didask.* 162.24–166.14 with Bos, “Plutarch on the Sleeping Soul”, 39–41.

³⁶ Plu., *De fac.* 940F; *De an. procr.* 1026E–F.

³⁷ Bos, “Plutarch on the Sleeping Soul”, 39–40.

³⁸ See an overview in Ziegler, “Plutarchos”, 768–803. In any case, 74 of the 227 works of the Lamprias catalogue are concerned with ethical issues.

³⁹ M. Baltes, “Plutarch of Chaeronea. III Philosophical Work”, in “Plutarchus”. See L. van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics* (Oxford 2010) Published on Oxford Scholarship Online: September 2010. <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199583263.001.0001/acprof-9780199583263>.

⁴⁰ For the importance of morality in the *Lives*, see F. Frazier, *Histoire et morale dans les Vies parallèles de Plutarque* (Paris 1996); C. Pelling, “The Moralism of Plutarch's *Lives*”, in D. Innes – H. Hine & C. Pelling (eds), *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for D. Russell on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Oxford 1995) 205–220, [repr. in C. Pelling (ed.), *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (London 2002) 237–251]; T.E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford 1999).

⁴¹ See Ziegler, “Plutarchos”, 636–637 under “popular philosophisch-ethische Schriften”. Against this label due to Plutarch's expected readership, see van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics*, 11; see also C. Pelling, “What is Popular about Plutarch's ‘Popular Philosophy’?”, in G. Roskam & L. Van der Stockt (eds), *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics. Plutarchea hypomnemata* (Leuven 2011) 41–58.

⁴² See, in general, Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*; D.A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London 1973); J. Boulogne, *Plutarque: Un aristocrate grec sous l'occupation romaine* (Lille 1994); and J. Sirinelli, *Plutarque de Chéronée* (Paris 2000). See H.G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele* (Bonn 1971) on Plutarch's *On the Control of Anger*, *On Talkativeness*, *On Curiosity*, *On Complacency*, and *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*; and D. Tsekourakis, *Οἱ Λαικοφιλοσοφικές πραγματείες τοῦ Πλουτάρχου. Ἡ σχέση τους μετὰ τὴ διατριβή καὶ μετὰ ἄλλα παραπλήσια γραμματειακά εἶδη* (Thessaloniki 1983); L. Van der Stockt, “Aspects of the Ethics and Poetics of the Dialogue in the *Corpus Plutarcheum*”, in I. Gallo & C. Moreschini (eds), *I generi letterari in Plutarco. Atti del VIII Convegno plutarcheo, Pisa, 2–4 giugno 1999* (Naples 2000) 93–116.

⁴³ Van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics*; See, in general, the whole volume published by Roskam and Van der Stockt, *Virtues for the People*, but especially the introduction by

In ethics, Plutarch's point of departure is clearly Platonic-Aristotelian. To begin with, he generally endorsed Plato's view of the soul, exposed in the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* as consisting of rational, spirited and passionate parts. However, Plutarch more closely followed Aristotle's philosophy in allotting the two latter parts to an irrational part that resulted in the bipartition into rational and irrational halves.⁴⁴ His view of the passions, consequently, was also clearly Platonic-Aristotelian, since he conceived of them as arising in the irrational part of the soul when rationality appears to have lost control of the soul complex. *On Moral Virtue*, for example, he even distinguishes between practical and theoretical virtue on the basis that the former exclusively deals with the irrational part of the soul and with taming emotions. This, of course, implies his view of the passions as important contributors to the *tonus* of the soul and of *metriopatheia* as the only way to deal with passions in a proper way.⁴⁵ In *On Moral Virtue*, Plutarch frequently referred to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* in order to assess his view of virtue as a *mesotes*.⁴⁶

Admittedly, his position is sometimes far from clear, often due to Plutarch's active involvement in the philosophical discussions of his time: sometimes Plutarch purposefully used Stoic terminology to turn it polemically against them; other times, the lack of clarity results from the tradition he is following, be it Stoic, Cynic or other. It is precisely this difficulty that Angelo Becchi's article on Plutarchean ethics, "The Doctrine of the Passions: Plutarch, Posidonius and Galen", intends to tackle. As a scholar with a profound knowledge of Plutarch's ethics, to which he has devoted numerous studies,⁴⁷ Becchi attempts to determine Plutarch's position on ethics more

G. Roskam & L. Van der Stock, "Efficiency and Effectiveness in Plutarch's Broadcasting Ethics", 7–16 and the papers by L. van Hoof, "Plutarch's Diet Ethics Precepts of Healthcare Between Diet and Ethics", 109–132; H.M. Martin, "Plutarch's Morality: Arete Tyche and Non-Consequentialism", 133–150; J. Opsomer, "Virtue, Fortune and Happiness in Theory and Practice", 151–174; and A.G. Nikolaidis, "Plutarch's 'Minor Ethics': Some Remarks on *De Garrulitate*, *De Curiositate*, and *De Vitioso Pudore*", 205–222.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Plu., *Qu. Plat.* 9, 1007E; *De virt. mor.* 442A.

⁴⁵ Plu., *De virt. mor.* 451B.

⁴⁶ Plu., *De virt. mor.* 444C–445A. See, in general, Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 192–198.

⁴⁷ See, for example, F. Becchi, *Plutarco, La virtù etica* (Naples 1999); "Animadversiones Plutarchae: *De cohibenda ira et De ira*", *Lexis* 20 (2002) 133–142; "La pensée morale de Plutarque et le *Peri orgês*: une nouvelle interprétation", in J. Ribeiro Ferreira & D. Leão (eds), *Os fragmentos de Plutarco e a recepção da sua obra* (Coimbra 2003) 89–109; "La dottrina del telos nel pensiero e nell'opera di Plutarco", in M. Jufresa, F. Mestre, P. Gómez & P. Gilabert (eds), *Plutarco a la seva època: Paideia i Societat. Actas del VIII Simposio Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Plutarquistas. Barcelona 6–8 de Noviembre de 2003* (Barcelona 2005)

clearly. As he affirms, Plutarch's ethical affiliation was mainly that of a Platonist⁴⁸ and as such he regularly adopted a clear anti-Stoic attitude. Despite this, it is possible to find the influence of Stoic doctrines in his work, an issue which, as Becchi rightly claims, still needs a satisfying explanation.

This is especially noteworthy in regard to the passions, where we find strictly Platonic positions beside notions of a clear Stoic matrix: even as he openly criticized Chrysippus' view of passion as a mistake, Plutarch nevertheless appears to have combined a Platonic view of affections with the Stoic doctrine of *διαστροφή*, which explained how due to weakness (*ἀσθένεια*) of the mind,⁴⁹ passions may appear to drive people to vice. Indeed, Plutarch attacked his contemporaries for being in a state of 'mental poverty' (*πενία ψυχική*) brought about by their false opinions; allowing first for bad habits, this state forms at the end a second nature that prevents people from being free from error. According to Becchi, Plutarch did not actually contradict himself: in line with Posidonius but anticipating Galen, Plutarch asserted that ignorance and bad habits may sometimes incline to passions even those people who lack violent passionate impulses and have a sound rational part of the soul. Becchi's analysis of numerous passages from *Moralia* and *Lives* provides an overview of Plutarch's view of passions as "affections causing pain and fear in men not prepared by reason to bear bad luck". In fact, lack of philosophical training may cause inconsistencies and anomalies both in people with good natural qualities and in great characters. Wisdom should therefore be revered as most important and perfect art, as the culmination of both good reputation and all human endeavors.

The influence of the external world on the individual's soul also plays an important role in Raúl Caballero's chapter on the "Adventitious Motions of the Soul (Plu., *De Stoic. repugn.* 23, 1045B–F) and the Controversy between Aristo of Chios and the Middle Academy". Incidentally, it also places us at a general level in front of the inherent hermeneutic difficulties related to Plutarch's testimony of the philosophical discussion and interschool

199–208; "Éthique et régime alimentaire dans les écrits plutarquiens de psychologie animale", in J. Boulogne (ed.), *Les Grecs de l'Antiquité et les animaux. Le cas remarquable de Plutarque. V Réseau international de recherche et de formation à la recherche "Plutarque"*, Lille 12–13 Décembre 2003 (Lille 2005) 145–155; "Apatheia e metriopatheia in Plutarco", in A. Casanova (ed.), *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studi, Firenze 23–24 Settembre 2004* (Firenze 2005) 385–400.

⁴⁸ See below, this volume, 43–53 and F. Becchi, "Plutarco tra platonismo e aristotelismo: la filosofia come *paideia* dell'anima", in Pérez Jiménez et al., *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles*, 25–43.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Plu., *De tranq. an.* 468D; for the Stoic view, see Posid., fr. 169.77–117 E.-K.

polemics in which he took an active part and which, as we already noted, often appeared to be “deformed” due to the context of the tradition in which his discussion took place. Caballero’s article provides a good example of Plutarch’s combination of an anti-Stoic attitude with his rhetorical strategies to attack them.

In *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 23, Plutarch referred to Chrysippus’ criticism of some philosophers who advocated the “adventitious faculty or motion of the soul” (ἡ ἐπελευστικὴ δύναμις / κίνησις τῆς ψυχῆς), a kind of motion taking place in the commanding part of the soul that has the power to release impulses from external causes. Of the three current interpretations of “these philosophers” (Stoic, Epicurean and Academic), Caballero regards the third as the most consistent since it fits with what is known about the criteria of action described by Arcesilaus and his disciples (Middle Academy) in their controversy with Zeno and his disciples of the early Stoa. Building upon previous work,⁵⁰ Caballero argues that Chrysippus was not attacking Aristo of Chios and his disciples, who introduced the idea of ἐπελεύσεις (*occurrentia*), but Arcesilaus and/or his followers of the Middle Academy, who probably adopted their terminology for dialectical purposes, which was a usual Academic method in their debates with the Stoics.

With Brenk’s article on “Plutarch and ‘Pagan Monotheism’”, we move to a cardinal subject in Plutarch’s work, namely his philosophical monotheism, a theme on which Plutarch has had an enormous lasting influence. The first decade of the twenty-first century produced a large number of important publications: aside from traditional studies focusing on Jewish-Christian monotheism alone and the way in which Christianity did or did not inherit Jewish monotheism⁵¹—showing an interest at the most in Near-Eastern precedents⁵²—numerous recent investigations claim the need to

⁵⁰ R. Caballero, “La doctrina de las ἐπελεύσεις y la libertad de indiferencia: de Aristón de Quíos a Arcesilao (Plut., *Stoic. rep.* 23, 1045 B–F)”, in F. Frazier & D.F. Leão (eds), *Tychè et Pronoia. La marche du monde selon Plutarque* (Coimbra 2010) 13–38 at 13–15; idem, “Entre la necesidad del destino y la libertad del átomo: el *clinamen* epicúreo y la libertad de indiferencia (Plut., *Stoic. rep.* 23, 1045B–F)”, in A. Pérez Jiménez & I. Calero Secall (eds), *Δῶρον Μνημοσύνης. Miscelánea de estudios ofrecidos a M^a Ángeles Durán López* (Zaragoza 2011) 69–82.

⁵¹ See, for example, the collection of articles published by L.T. Stuckenbruck & W.W.S. North (eds), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London–New York 2004); W. Weiß, *Der eine Gott und das gemeinschaftliche Mahl: Inklusion und Exklusion biblischer Vorstellungen von Mahl und Gemeinschaft im Kontext antiker Festkultur* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2011) and U. Mell (ed.), *Der eine Gott und die Geschichte der Völker: Studien zur Inklusion und Exklusion im biblischen Monotheismus* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2011).

⁵² Thus the volume edited by B. Pongratz-Leisten (ed.), *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Winona Lake 2011).

widen the scope of research⁵³ to include all late antique monotheistic manifestations⁵⁴ and thus provide a sound context in which the success of Jewish-Christian monotheism may be plausibly explained. And indeed, ever since the publication of the collection of articles prepared by P. Athanassiadis and M. Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*,⁵⁵ research into paganism has received growing attention.⁵⁶

This is the approach we find in the article by Brenk, a specialist on Plutarch's monotheistic traits. This issue has received important attention in recent years and studies have underlined both the Platonic context in which Plutarch's view of God should be placed⁵⁷ and the characteristic way in which his monotheistic inclinations are presented.⁵⁸ More specifically, scholars have focused on the characteristics of this divinity,⁵⁹ namely his unity and personality.⁶⁰ In line with Plutarch's view that philosophical truth transcends ethnic boundaries,⁶¹ Brenk reconstructs the monotheistic soil on which Christianity was going to develop, taking Akhenaten's monotheistic enterprise in the second half of the second millennium BC as a starting point. After briefly reviewing *On Isis and Osiris*, the text in which Plutarch reduced the divine to one God, Brenk surveys those Plutarchean texts that may have exerted a major influence on Christian monotheism. *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* is one of these texts, since it describes the activity of a divinity crafting the world in a technomorphic cosmogonical model similar to that of Christianity.⁶² *The E at Delphi*, however, is the text in which

⁵³ D. Staudt, *Der eine und einzige Gott: monotheistische Formeln im Urchristentum und ihre Vorgeschichte bei Griechen und Juden* (Göttingen 2012).

⁵⁴ See, for example, E. Bons & T. Legrand, *Le monothéisme biblique: évolution, contextes et perspectives* (Paris 2011).

⁵⁵ P. Athanassiadi & M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford–New York 1999).

⁵⁶ See, for example, R.G. Kratz & H. Spieckermann (eds), *Götterbilder, Gottesbilder, Weltbilder: Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der Welt der Antike* (Tübingen 2006); S. Mitchell & P. van Nuffelen, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2010).

⁵⁷ F. Ferrari, "Der Gott Plutarchs und der Gott Platons", in R. Hirsch-Luipold (ed.), *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch. Götter Bilder – Gottesbilder – Weltbilder* (Berlin–New York 2005) 13–26; F.E. Brenk, "Plutarch's Middle Platonic God: About to Enter (Or Remake) the Academy", in Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott und die Götter*, 27–49.

⁵⁸ Especially interesting in this line is the study by Hirsch-Luipold, "Der eine Gott bei Philo von Alexandrien und Plutarch", in idem, *Gott und die Götter*, 141–168.

⁵⁹ Hirsch-Luipold, "Der eine Gott", 152–161.

⁶⁰ See previous note and notably D. Massaro, "To theion e o theos in Plutarco", in Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione*, 337–355.

⁶¹ Brenk, "Plutarch and Pagan Monotheism", 73–84 at 73–74.

⁶² The distinction between the technomorphic vs the biomorphic cosmogonical models

Plutarch elevated the figure of Apollo above the pantheon—provided that the author is not echoing Ammonius' position rather than stating his own—in describing him in the famous fashion as *a-polus* or *a-polla* 'not many'.⁶³ In the author's view a comparison between Plutarch's monotheistic traits and Christian monotheism shows interesting similarities since they both constructed an idea of a supreme God by combining ethnographic studies to achieve a "true concept" of God and a philosophical well-defined view of God.

As already stated, Plutarch's influence on posterity has been extensive. Beside his views on ethics, his echo of the interschool polemics and the development of his philosophical monotheism, his testimony has also been crucial to the understanding of numerous famous figures of antiquity, notably Alcibiades, whose noxious attitude towards his native city was used in later tradition to attack the value and integrity of Platonic philosophy. Geert Roskam's article on "Socrates and Alcibiades: a Notorious *σκάνδαλον* in the Later Platonist Tradition", approaches their famous relationship from a political and an ethical perspective. As to the former, it briefly surveys the favorable and negative approaches to Socrates' double indictment for impiety and for corrupting the youth, evaluating the extent to which the second charge may not be alluding (even if indirectly) to the philosopher's association with influential statesmen such as Critias and Alcibiades. The ethical aspect comes to the fore when considering Socrates' influence on Alcibiades. Indeed Socrates' view that no one willingly goes wrong and the effectiveness of his educative and philosophical enterprise seemed to be blatantly refuted in the person of Alcibiades: if he was brilliant himself and had in Socrates the best possible teacher, how is it possible that his behavior deviated so much from the expected norm and caused so much harm to his native city?

This issue, of course, raised interesting philosophical questions that were amply dealt with in an early period of antiquity (e.g. Plato, Xenophon,

is due to Burkert, *apud* J.N. Bremmer, "Canonical and Alternative Creation Myths in Ancient Greece", in G. van Kooten (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-interpretations of Genesis I in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics* (Leiden 2005) 73–96. On Plutarch's *De animae procr.*, see L. Baldi, *Plutarco. La generazione dell'anima nel Timeo* (Naples 2002).

⁶³ See J. Whittaker, "Ammonius on the Delphic E", *CQ* 19 (1969) 185–192 [= *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London 1984) ch. V]; see also idem, "Plutarch, Platonism and Christianity", in H.J. Blumenthal & R.A. Markus (eds), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong* (London 1981) 50–63 [= *Studies in Platonism*, ch. XXVIII, at 53–54].

Aeschines of Sphettus or Polycrates the Sophist) and continued to be relevant at a later time. As Roskam shows, Plutarch and Proclus provided testimony to the interest of later Platonists and the similarities between their approaches to the topic shows the extent to which Plutarch was read in antiquity. The differences in their approaches, however, make clear that Proclus mainly viewed Plutarch as a historian, which seems to be supported by the fact that he never quoted him by name.⁶⁴

The last chapter of the philosophical section, “Salt in the Holy Water: Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Naturales* in Michael Psellus’ *De omnifaria doctrina*” by Michiel Meeusen, explores medieval Platonic scholar Psellus’ reaction to Plutarch. In his work *De omnifaria doctrina*, Psellus addressed scientific problems from Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Naturales*, notably those concerning physics and physiology. Meeusen focuses on the (mainly Platonic) sources of the first redaction of this work, with a view to focusing on the problems taken from Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Naturales*. He stresses the importance of a detailed study of the work even from a purely textual perspective, since Psellus’ interventions not only allow us to understand his working methods, but also provide insight into how he understood and dealt with *Quaestiones Naturales*.

2. Plutarch and the Religious Discourse

Plutarch’s role in the history of ancient religiosity is as central as the one he plays in the history of ancient philosophy. One may even contest the separation of philosophy and religion in his work, claiming that such a distinction reveals itself to be artificial.⁶⁵ This idea may perhaps also be extrapolated to the whole historical period of late antiquity, in which the confluence between philosophy and religion or religion and philosophy marks off spirituality. In his comparative study of Philo and Plutarch’s ideas of god, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold suggestively affirms that the comparison between both Platonists reveals a complete blend of religion and philosophy that is characterized by three distinctive elements:

⁶⁴ G. Roskam, “Socrates and Alcibiades: a Notorious *σχάνδαλον* in the Later Platonist Tradition”, 85–100.

⁶⁵ On Plutarch’s comingling of religion and philosophy, see in general the volume edited by Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione* and particularly the articles by W. Burkert, “Plutarco: Religiosità personale e teologia filosofica”, in Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione*, 11–28 and Moreschini, “Religion e filosofia in Plutarco”, *ibid.* 29–48.

- a) the combination of religious spirituality with philosophical speculation;
- b) the allegorical interpretation of religious traditions; and
- c) an emphasis on the immateriality and transcendence of a divinity whose unity and interaction with the world are facts.⁶⁶

This combination of elements, foreseen by both authors, was rather widespread from the second century onwards. Taking its presence as a touchstone, we may widen the group to include many other Middle Platonists and Neopythagoreans as well as other authors such as those included in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Nag Hammadi Library.⁶⁷

The testimony of Plutarch also reveals itself to be essential for the assessment of numerous general and particular religious issues, as with philosophical issues. The role and character of Dionysus in late antiquity is one example: Orphism and Dionysianism occupy a prominent place in the works of Plutarch's *Lives* and *Moralia*.⁶⁸ The relationship between Orphism and Dionysianism in antiquity was given due attention by Ana Isabel Jiménez in a previous work.⁶⁹ In this volume, her chapter on "Iacchus in Plutarch" relies

⁶⁶ See Hirsch-Luipold, "Der eine Gott", 161–167, the section called "Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion als Grundzug der Philosophie- und Religionsgeschichte der frühen Kaiserzeit", in which (at 161) he affirms: "Dabei wird deutlich worden, dass die gängigen Grenzziehungen zwischen Philosophie und Religion einerseits und zwischen jüdisch-christlicher (religiöser) Tradition und griechischer (philosophischer) Tradition andererseits verdecken, wie sehr das Verhältnis durch gegenseitige Beeinflussungen bestimmt ist, die das Wesen mindestens eines Stranges des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus ausmachen, der als religiöse Philosophie zu verstehen ist".

⁶⁷ For the relationship between Plutarch and some of the Nag Hammadi texts, see L. Roig Lanzillotta, "Plutarch of Chaeronea and the Gnostic Worldview: Middle Platonism and the Nag Hammadi Library", in J.M. Candau Morón – F.J. González Ponce & A.L. Chávez Reino (eds), *Plutarco como transmisor. Actas del X Simposio Internacional de la Sociedad española de Plutarquistas. Sevilla, 12–14 de noviembre 2009* (Sevilla 2011) 401–417.

⁶⁸ On Plutarch and Orphism, see G. Méautis, "Plutarque et l'Orphisme", in *Mélanges G. Glotz* (Paris 1932) 575–585; R. Turcan, "Bona Dea et la Mere ineffable de Dionysus (Plut., *Caes.* 9)", in D. Porte & J.P. N'eraudau (eds), *Hommages à Henri Le Bonnieur* (Brussels 1988) 428–440; M. Pinnoy, "Plutarque et l'orphisme", *AncSoc* 21 (1990) 201–214; L. Brisson, "Orphée et l'orphisme à l'époque impériale. Témoignages et interprétations philosophiques, de Plutarque à Jamblique", *ANRW* II.36.4 (1990) 2869–2931. For a recent and thorough analysis, see especially A. Bernabé, "Plutarco e l'orfismo", in Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione*, 63–104, with a textual appendix including a complete list of all Plutarch's passages referring to Orphism. On Dionysus in Plutarch, see G. Cassadio, "Osiride in Grecia e Diniso in Egitto", in Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione*, 201–227.

⁶⁹ On the differences, similarities and intersections between Orphism and Dionysism, see the thorough analysis by A. Jiménez San Cristóbal, "Orfismo y Dionisismo", in A. Bernabé & F. Casadesús (eds), *Orfeo y la tradición órfica. Un reencuentro* (Madrid 2008) 697–727.

on Plutarch's testimony to shed some light on an inveterate interpretation related to the god, namely whether the name Iacchus originally referred to an independent deity from Eleusinian circles that was later assimilated to Dionysus or whether it is an epiclesis of the god.⁷⁰ Numerous artistic and literary testimonies assimilate both names and the scholarly literature on the issue is far from reaching consensus. Jiménez's approach to the subject matter surveys sections of Plutarch's *Lives* and describes the procession that escorted Iacchus from Athens to Eleusis with a view to solving this hotly debated issue.

The philosophical section provides a first approach to Plutarch's theology by analyzing his philosophical monotheism and framing his views about the divine both in Platonism and in the wider context of late antique monotheistic tendencies. As stated above, Plutarch mainly based his views, as expressed in *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* and in *The E at Delphi*, on Plato's *Timaeus*. Plutarch's reception and use of the latter also occupies a central place in the chapter by Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Plutarch's Idea of God in the Religious and Philosophical Context of Late Antiquity". It is well known that in *The Malice of Herodotus* (857F–858A), Plutarch rejected Herodotus' motto *πᾶν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχώδες* and accused the historian of blasphemy and malice. According to the traditional interpretation, Plutarch was reacting against a view of the gods as "utterly envious and always ready to confound us". However, such an interpretation clearly misses the point of Plutarch's criticism: first of all, the traditional interpretation seems to rely on an over-interpretation of Herodotus' conception of the divinity that interprets as "envious" (*φθονερόν*), which we may perhaps rather translate as "avaricious, stingy".⁷¹ In the second place, for a thinker such as Plutarch who was so well versed in the *Timaeus* and who had such a refined and elevated view of the divine, the attack on Herodotus' misconception of the divinity—and his labeling Herodotus *nota bene* as blasphemous and malicious—must concern some more fundamental aspect of the divinity than the sheer attribution of envy to god.

⁷⁰ See Ana Isabel Jiménez, "Iacchus in Plutarch", 125–135; see esp. 125 notes 2 and 3 for the numerous scholars for and against this assimilation.

⁷¹ See L. Roig Lanzillotta, "Plutarch's Idea of God in the Religious and Philosophical Context of Late Antiquity", 137–150 and, in general idem, *La envidia en el pensamiento griego. De la época arcaica al helenismo* (Diss. Universidad Complutense; Madrid 1997); see also idem, "The So-called Envy of the Gods. Revisiting a Dogma of Ancient Greek Religion", in J. Dijkstra et al. (eds), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (Leiden 2010) 75–93.

Taking this passage from *The Malice of Herodotus* as a starting point, Roig Lanzillotta illuminates numerous aspects of Plutarch's role as an interpreter, a theologian and a philosopher. Comparing this work with other Plutarchean passages that comment on the divine helps us to clarify both Plutarch's point of criticism and his view of the divinity. Plutarch's views on the divine should be placed in the context of the Middle Platonists' reception of *Timaeus* 29E, the *locus classicus* for the definition of God's goodness and his implicit creative activity. More specifically, his views should be placed in the context of Middle Platonic theodicy that denied any divine responsibility for the appearance of evil or imperfection in the realm of creation. In echoing and commenting upon Plato's words, Middle Platonists were mainly concerned with God's creative impulse, the stainless goodness behind it and the impossibility of making him responsible for anything imperfect that resulted from his activity.

The usefulness of Plutarch's testimony for the reconstruction of the religious map of late antiquity, however, is not exhausted by the information he transmitted as a detached observer. As already stated, his testimony is especially valuable for the active part he played in the religious world he described.⁷² This close relationship comes to the fore in Angelo Casanova's chapter, "Plutarch as Apollo's Priest at Delphi". Despite the numerous works pondering Plutarch's relationship with Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi, the Pythia, Delphic religion or Apollo,⁷³ the fact is that Plutarch himself rarely referred to his role as a priest of Apollo. However, in spite of his relative silence about his office, there are a couple of Plutarchean places⁷⁴ in which the writer referred to it *in passant*. Casanova's philological mastery extracts all the information provided by the testimonies and, combining it with the Delphic inscription Syll.3 829A, extrapolates this information in order to illuminate a passage of *The E at Delphi* (385A), the obscurity of which has led some scholars to amend the text.

Beside the interest of Plutarch's testimony in the reconstruction of official Greek religion, *Moralia* also attests to his interest in a more popular

⁷² See, on this issue, W. Burkert, "Religiosità personale", *passim*.

⁷³ See below, this volume, 151–157. See also Flacelière, "Plutarch e la Pythia"; for Plutarch and Delphi, see Brenk, "The Religious Spirit", 330–336; also see the three relevant studies in the volume edited by Gallo, *Plutarco e la religione*: G. Sfameni Gasparro, "Plutarco e la religione delfica. Il dio filosofo e il suo profeta" (157–188); F. Conca, "Osservazioni sulla lingua e lo stile dei *Dialoghi Delfici*" (189–200); I. Chirassi Colombo, "Pythia e Sybilla. I problema dell'*atechnos mantiké* in Plutarco" (429–447); see more recently, P.A. Stadter, "Plutarch and Apollo of Delphi", in Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott und die Götter*, 197–214.

⁷⁴ See Plu., *An sen.* 792F and *Qu. conv.* 700E.

kind of religiosity. Scholarly consensus finds that his attitude towards popular beliefs in general and to superstitions of all kinds—such as omens, portents or evil daimones—in particular was rather reluctant⁷⁵ since he prided himself on his rationalism. However, the dichotomy of rational versus superstitious has been softened by recent studies.⁷⁶ Plutarch's *On superstition*, well known for his criticism of superstitious practices and beliefs, ridicules omens, portents, dreams and belief in the torments of the after-life. However, as has been pointed out, “when one reads his *Lives* and even many of his *Moralia* one cannot help but feel that he reflects to an astounding degree a certain complex of popular beliefs in his day”.⁷⁷ In spite of the criticism expressed elsewhere, Plutarch seems to have sometimes given credence to the supernatural and *Lives* abundantly exploits the dramatic power of premonitory events such as omens, portents, dreams and even eclipses.

This contrast comes to the fore in Aurelio Pérez Jiménez's chapter on “Plutarch's Attitude Towards Astral Biology”. Despite the fact that recent studies affirm that Plutarch was critical of popular beliefs such as the symbolism and influence of the stars on animals or humans,⁷⁸ the study of relevant Plutarchean texts shows that the Chaeronean's views are more nuanced than scholars have been ready to admit. It is true that his position was generally rather rational and that he may have criticized superstitious beliefs that claim human beings are dependent on the stars and planets. However, as Pérez Jiménez shows, when astral biology seemed to be well grounded in ancestral observation, Plutarch was more prone to give credence to those beliefs.

Another example of Plutarch's inclination to deal with popular beliefs in a rather positive way may be seen in his echo of the ancient superstition

⁷⁵ On superstition, see H. Moellering, *Plutarch on Superstition* (Boston 1963) 165–173; on the miraculous, B. Mackay, “Plutarch and the Miraculous”, in C.F.D. Moule (ed.), *Miracles. Studies in their Philosophy and History* (London 1965) 93–113; and G.T. Smith, *The Importance of Miracle in the Religious Truth of Plutarch of Chaeronea* (Diss. New York 1972). For his hostility towards the belief in evil demons, see Brenk, “The Religious Spirit”, 277.

⁷⁶ See R. Gordon, “Fear of Freedom? Selective Continuity in Religion During the Hellenistic Period”, *Didaskalos* 4 (1972) 48–60, who relativised the view by E.R. Dodds, as expressed in his *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951). See also Brenk, “The Religious Spirit”, 260–261.

⁷⁷ F.E. Brenk, “And to all the Sign Seemed Evil: Omens and Portents”, in idem, *In Mist Apparellled. Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives* (Leiden 1977) 184–213.

⁷⁸ See J. Hani, *La religion Égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris 1976) and the criticism expressed by Aurelio Pérez Jiménez in his chapter, 159–169.

of the evil eye, belief in which was rather widespread in antiquity.⁷⁹ Admittedly, the question as to whether or not the evil eye should be considered a superstition is not that simple. It seems evident that, from a modern perspective, such a “belief” is simple superstition, but it was not that clear from an ancient perspective. Ever since Democritus, belief in the evil eye had been given a “physical” explanation, the validity of which can be traced up to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.⁸⁰ That the line between well-founded belief (or even science) and superstition is rather tenuous can be seen in the fact that what for us is simply *Aberglaube* was during centuries past a rather solid piece of scientific theory.⁸¹ The chapter by Paola Volpe-Cacciatore, “‘Cicalata sul fascino volgarmente detto jettatura’: Plutarch, *Qu. conv.* 5.7”, provides a wide survey of beliefs about the evil eye and the power ancients attributed to the look of the envious. The chapter begins with the eighteenth-century study by N. Valletta, commented upon by B. Croce, in order to focus on the discussion of the motif in Plutarch’s *Table Talks*. The discussion shows that although Plutarch was reluctant to embrace popular superstitions, he gave them some credence when they could be supported by the opinions of the ancients.

With Delfim Leão’s chapter “The Eleusinian Mysteries and Political Timing in the *Life of Alcibiades*”, we move away from popular beliefs to focus on Plutarch’s interest in ancient history and more specifically on the relationship he saw between religious manifestations and political events. In his interpretation, the Eleusinian Mysteries mirrored periods of political and religious instability in Athenian society. Plutarch’s *Life of Alcibiades* provides an excellent example thereof as it shows that the Eleusinian Mysteries were closely connected to the life and political career of this charismatic statesman in two decisive moments: first, on the occasion of his process for *asebeia* that determined his exile and second, during his triumphant

⁷⁹ See, in general, S. Seligman, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker* (Berlin 1910).

⁸⁰ S. Seligman, *Die Zauberkraft des Auges und das Berufen: ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte des Aberglaubens* (The Hague 1985); see more recently Th. Rakoczy, *Böser Blick, Macht des Auges und Neid der Götter: eine Untersuchung zur Kraft des Blickes in der griechischen Literatur* (Tübingen 1996).

⁸¹ For the symbolism of the eye in antiquity, see M. Steinhart, *Das Motiv des Auges in der griechischen Bildkunst* (Mainz 1995); for its reception in the Renaissance, see, for example, Garcilaso de La Vega’s sonnet VIII that plays on the Democritean view that the atoms are projected from the eyes of the envious, reaching the object of their envy (to describe the way the sight of the beloved acts upon the lover). But see already Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova* 19.70–73, “Degli occhi suoi, comme ch’ ella gli muova/ escono spirti d’amore infiammati/, che fieron gli occhi a qual, che allor gli guati/ e pasan sì che ‘l cor ciascun ritrova”.

return to Athens.⁸² The negative and positive roles, respectively, played by the Eleusinian Mysteries on both occasions reflect the favor and resistance Alcibiades enjoyed in Athenian society at different times of his life, revealing the extent to which religion and politics were interconnected during the upheavals of Athenian history.

The blend of religion and philosophy we characterized above as being part of late antique thought in general and of Philo and Plutarch in particular, comes to the fore in Rosario Scannapieco's chapter "Μυστηριώδης θεολογία: Plutarch's Fr. 157 Sandbach between Cultural Traditions and Philosophical Models". The analysis of fr. 157 Sandbach is the starting point for a wide-ranging study of Plutarch's view of myth and his eclectic approach to its interpretation. It shows Plutarch's interest in the theme of conjugal love, which was also present in his dialogue *On Love* and which also underlies the Egyptian myth in *On Isis and Osiris*. The author uncovers close ideological connections between the texts by analyzing the rhetorico-formal structures of the fragment in which Plutarch seems to have suggested a mystico-religious interpretation of reality.

Plutarch's testimony about the history of religions and, more specifically, religious movements in the Mediterranean during the first centuries CE is enormously important. He was a first-rate witness to early Christianity. Though his testimony was mainly indirect, this is precisely what makes his views so important for the reconstruction of the religious atmosphere at the time of the emergence of Christianity. As has been pointed out, "the lifetime of Plutarch, falling within the later first and early second century, coincides with one of the most crucial moments in the history of human thought, in that it was precisely during the lifetime of Plutarch that the new religion of Christianity came into contact with the old and well-established world of Greek philosophy. Thus the writings of Plutarch (...) permit us to access the intellectual state of the Graeco-Roman world at the exact moment of contact".⁸³

George van Kooten's chapter, "A Non-Fideistic Interpretation of πίστις in Plutarch's Writings: the Harmony between πίστις and Knowledge", explains how Plutarch's testimony can help us improve our understanding of early Christianity. Van Kooten engages in a thorough study of Plutarch's uses of

⁸² See below, this volume, 181–192. The charismatic political and social figure of Alcibiades is also addressed by G. Roskam in chapter 5, 85–100.

⁸³ J. Whittaker, "Plutarch, Platonism and Christianity", in Blumenthal & Marus, *Neoplatonism*, 50–63 at 50.

the terms *πίστις* and *πιστεύειν* in *Moralia* in order to show the need for a better understanding of the notion of “belief” (*πίστις*) in both paganism and Christianity. Comparison with Plutarch shows that it is incorrect to differentiate between the many classical meanings of *πίστις*—which are allowed to vary depending on the context—and a specific theological, Pauline meaning.

The need to contextualize the Christian understanding of *πίστις* has also been recently supported at a general level by a conference organized by the Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne and the Institut européen en sciences des religions of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Indeed, under the title “Conviction, croyance, foi: *pistis* et *fides* de Platon aux Pères”,⁸⁴ the colloquium tried to trace the origin and development of this central notion in the religions of the ancient Mediterranean world. At a particular level, several studies by F. Frazier have already pointed out the central importance of the notion in Plutarch’s work.⁸⁵

According to van Kooten, the terms have been traditionally explained differently depending on their pagan or Christian contexts. While in the former the term *πίστις* allows for a variety of interpretations depending on its immediate context, in the latter it is interpreted exclusively according to its allegedly theological meaning, which allows for an exclusively “fideistic” interpretation. In the author’s view, this is partly due to the influence of Luther’s interpretation of Christianity, which was based on faith, and to Kantian philosophy, which strictly allotted the realms of belief and knowledge to religion and philosophy respectively. The study of Plutarch’s use of the terms, however, shows that the modern “fideistic” interpretation of *pistis* in Pauline writings is barely tenable, since Plutarch’s *Moralia* also includes senses such as “persuasion” or “trust”, the religious meaning “belief” and even a philosophical sort of belief based on reason and proof.

The book draws to a close with an interesting chapter by Israel Muñoz Gallarte, “The Colors of the Soul”, which once again shows the value of Plutarch’s treasury of echoes of notions vaguely or firmly held in late antiquity. Muñoz Gallarte focuses on an intriguing subject that is strictly connected with the widely attested belief of the soul’s descent from the divine region into the world of movement and decay. In fact, this view can be found in a variety of contexts covering the very wide spectrum from Plato

⁸⁴ Organized by Ch. Grellard (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne et Institut Universitaire de France), Ph. Hoffmann (École Pratique des Hautes Études) and L. Lavaud (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne).

⁸⁵ See the references below, 216 note 4.

to the Chaldean Oracles. More specifically, the focus of this chapter is the belief—derived from the intersection between myth, religion, astrology and philosophy—that during the soul's descent through the planetary spheres, the planets give the soul different powers, traits, vices or passions that, depending on their positive or negative character, help or bother the soul during its earthly life. Muñoz Gallarte focuses on the association of passions with certain colors which turn up in pagan, Christian and Christian apocryphal texts with a view to determining the extent to which we can establish a common background for views that are clearly related.

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